

# **BWA president emphasizes the priesthood of believers**

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The priesthood of believers not only serves as a doctrinal distinctive for Baptists, but also operates as a guiding principle for daily living and for “being the church,” [Baptist World Alliance President Tomás Mackey](#) told a gathering at Dallas Baptist University.

“It holds a distinctive and central place in Baptist ecclesiology, not merely as a doctrine that is stated, but as a living conviction that shapes the church’s identity, mission and structure,” said Mackey, a longtime Baptist leader in Argentina.

“The priesthood of believers of all believers is not just a doctrine. It is a way of life.”

Mackey spoke May 15 at the third annual Lecture Series on Baptist Distinctives, sponsored by the [Center for Baptist History and Heritage](#) at DBU.

## **Singular and plural**

Baptists believe both in the priesthood of each believer individually and in the priesthood of all believers collectively, he emphasized.

“The term ‘the priesthood of the believer’ emphasizes the biblical truths of individual responsibility and soul competency. And the term ‘the priesthood of all believers’ highlights that Christians collectively form a holy priesthood,” he said.

“For Baptists, the priesthood of all believers is more than a Reformation

doctrine or a Baptist distinctive. It is a way of being the church," he said.

## **Drawing lessons from the doctrine**

Mackey pointed to four lessons Baptists draw from the doctrine.

### **▪ All believers have direct access to God.**

Quoting Baptist theologian E.Y. Mullins, he said, "All believers have equal access to the Father's table, the Father's ear and the Father's heart."

"Each individual is competent and responsible to respond personally to God without coercion or the need for any intermediary," Mackey said, citing Mullins.

"Baptists hold that every believer is called, gifted and responsible for actively living their faith within the church and in the world.

"Each person has a God-given ability to know and follow God's will. Each person can and should read and interpret the Bible for himself or herself without relying on religious officials to dictate what they should believe."

### **▪ The church is a priestly community.**

"The New Testament refers to the holy priesthood of the whole people of God who are responsible for serving him through their spiritual gifts," Mackey said.

"Baptists understand worship, preaching, the ordinance of communion and witness as congregational acts carried out by the entire church. The church is not governed by a select clergy class but by the Spirit-led discernment of the whole congregation."

Ministry is the “shared calling of the entire church,” he said. “Leadership is responsible and accountable both to God and to the congregation.”

▪ **Every believer is a priest.**

“Baptists insist that all who believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior are believer-priests,” he said.

Mackey emphasized Christ’s priestly role as providing the foundation for believers’ role as priests.

“We must be Christ-centered,” he stressed.

The doctrine of the priesthood of believers “grounds all Christian ministries in Jesus’ saving work,” he said. As churches make decisions, they must seek to know “the will of the great High Priest.”

▪ **Christians are called to be priests to the world.**

The doctrine of the priesthood of believers overcomes artificial divisions between the sacred and the secular, Mackey said. It affirms daily work as a vocation in which believers live out their mission, calling and giftedness, he noted.

All believers have the responsibility to “represent Christ in the world,” Mackey said.

“Every believer is a missionary,” he said.

Mackey noted potential risks if the priesthood of believers is misunderstood and misapplied.

It can lead to an “overemphasis on individual autonomy.” It can “undermine

the unity of the church.”

And it can be used to “dismiss or undervalue the role of ordained leaders” in the church, he said.

## **Implications derived from the doctrine**

However, the benefits derived from the priesthood of believers far outweigh its risks, Mackey noted.

“The priesthood of believers emphasizes the value of every individual and the equal worth of every person in the eyes of God,” he said.

The priesthood of believers has broad implications for human rights and religious liberty, because it emphasizes “the dignity of the individuals in making moral and spiritual decisions without external coercion,” Mackey said.

The doctrine also has social implications as Christians make their voices heard in the public square, he added.

“The priesthood of believers encourages the church to become agents of change in society,” he said.

“The priesthood of believers advocates for a unified and purposeful community that reflects the values of justice, peace and equality.”

Because Baptists believe in the priesthood of believers, they have a responsibility not just to enlist church members but to make disciples who will serve both within the church and in the world, Mackey said.

He particularly stressed the importance of discipling the rising generation of Christian believers.

“In many parts of the world, we are losing the young people,” Mackey said.

Baptists have a responsibility to “train young priests who will use their vocations as instruments of God to serve in the contemporary culture,” he said.